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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY 25X1

Memorandum



THE SITUATION IN VIETNAM

Information as of 1600
10 July 1966

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HIGHLIGHTS

In South Vietnam US troops sprung a successful trap on an estimated Viet Cong regiment during Operation EL PASO II. In Saigon five Vietnamese generals recently linked to "struggle" movement received lenient treatment from the special disciplinary council. Hanoi has publicized steps to prepare for trials of captured US pilots. The Chinese Communists have rejected the Indian suggestion that the Geneva conference be reconvened.

I. The Military Situation in South Vietnam:
Elements of US 1st Infantry Division sprung a "reverse ambush" on estimated Viet Cong regiment during conduct of Operation EL PASO II in Binh Long Province (Paras. 1-3). ARVN Operation THANG LONG 243 inflicted heavy losses on Viet Cong units in Darlac Province (Para. 4). ARVN forces launched major "preventive action" with a ground and air campaign against possible Viet Cong staging areas near large US oil depot at Nha Be, southeast of Saigon (Para. 5). Two Viet Cong companies mounted a heavy attack against an ARVN battalion in South Vietnam's northernmost province, Quang Tri (Para. 6). US military police discovered seven Viet Cong Claymore mines near an American officers billet in downtown Saigon (Para. 7).

II. Political Developments in South Vietnam:
The five generals, including General Thi, received relatively light punishments from a specially convened disciplinary council, yesterday (Para. 1). A prominent Catholic leader indicated that Catholics generally support the present government and are moving ahead with plans to participate in the September elections (Paras. 2-3).

III. Military Developments in North Vietnam: US air strikes against North Vietnam during 8-10 July, including most of the significant targets attacked, are summarized (Paras. 1-4). Eleven SA-2 missiles were unsuccessfully fired at US strike aircraft on 8 July within a 55 nautical mile radius of Hanoi (Para. 5). Two USAF aircraft lost to enemy ground fire during 8-9 July (Para. 6).

IV. Other Communist Military Developments:
There is nothing of significance to report.

V. Communist Political Developments: The Chinese Communist have rejected the Indian proposal for reconvening the Geneva Conference and called for "unreserved" support to the Vietnamese Communists. They have, however, avoided any enlargement of Peking's public commitment to assist Hanoi (Paras. 1-4). Hanoi is publicizing steps to prepare a legal foundation for trials of captured US pilots as "war criminals" (Para. 5). The USSR has delivered a formal protest to the US in connection with strikes against targets in the Haiphong area (Para. 6).

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VI. Other Major Aspects:

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An inland road system, supplementing existing major routes, is nearing completion in North Vietnam's three southern provinces--Military Region IV. The new roads will provide a more flexible system for movement of supplies into southern DRV and Laos and reduce the vulnerability of the transport system to air strikes by providing alternate routes (Paras. 2-6).

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I. THE MILITARY SITUATION IN SOUTH VIETNAM

1. Elements of the US 1st Infantry Division sprung a "reverse ambush" this weekend on an estimated Communist regiment during the conduct of search-and-destroy Operation EL PASO II in Binh Long Province, and inflicted heavy losses on the enemy. The US battle plan, initiated during the early morning hours of 9 July, involved the deployment of a two-company armored column along a secondary road 12 miles southwest of the provincial capital of An Loc (50 miles north of Saigon) to lure a large enemy force into attacking. When the enemy took the bait the decoy column was immediately reinforced by four US heliborne battalions--supported by tactical air strikes and artillery bombardment. According to preliminary MACV reports the enemy unit, identified as the 272nd Viet Cong Regiment, lost 218 killed and eight captured. American casualties were 22 killed and 100 wounded. Three US armored personnel carriers (APCs) were destroyed, and one APC, one tank, and one Chinook helicopter damaged.

2. This action marked the second major defeat for a regimental-sized Communist force during the past ten days at the hands of US infantrymen participating in EL PASO II. On 30 June, the 71st Viet Cong Regiment was tricked into a similar "reverse ambush" along Highway 13 in the same general area of the 9 July engagement. On that occasion nearly 300 troops were killed.

3. Since its initiation on 2 June, Operation EL PASO II has resulted in cumulative enemy losses of 846 killed, 37 captured, 79 suspects apprehended, and more than 108 weapons seized. Allied casualties to date stand at 144 killed (122 US), 478 wounded (407 US), and 16 ARVN missing. Seven US and three ARVN infantry battalions are currently taking part in the operation.

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4. In the central highlands province of Darlac, search-and-destroy Operation THANG LONG 243 by two reinforced ARVN battalions established heavy contact during 9-10 July with company-strength or larger Viet Cong forces approximately 25 miles northeast of Ban Me Thuot. In the fighting that ensued, government forces, supported by heavy US tactical air strikes and artillery, killed 105 Viet Cong, while sustaining losses of 12 killed and 25 wounded.

5. Multibattalion ARVN task force elements, in conjunction with heavy tactical air support, launched a major search-and-destroy operation on 9 July near the strategically important US POL storage facility at Nha Be, eight miles southeast of Saigon. The operation is reportedly designed to prevent reprisals for American air raids against POL targets in the Hanoi-Haiphong area by attacks on the US depot. No enemy contact has thus far been reported.

Viet Cong Activity

6. An estimated two Communist companies attacked an ARVN battalion on 9 July approximately 16 miles west-southwest of Quang Tri City. Sixteen government soldiers were killed, seven wounded, and four missing, against enemy losses of four killed. US military advisers estimate that there are at least three Communist regiments, including possible major elements of the 324th PAVN Division, in the Ba Long area of Quang Tri Province.

7. On 9 July, US military police discovered seven Claymore - type fragmentation mines near the front gate of an American officers billet in the heart of Saigon's crowded downtown district. The explosives--identified as being of US manufacture--were hidden in a two-foot square box hidden between two jeeps. A bomb disposal team was dispatched to the scene and the mines were dismantled without incident. The attempted bombing may have been in response to a recent Viet Cong call for stepped-up terrorism against US personnel in the Saigon area in retaliation for US air strikes against POL storage facilities in the Hanoi-Haiphong area.

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II. POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS IN SOUTH VIETNAM

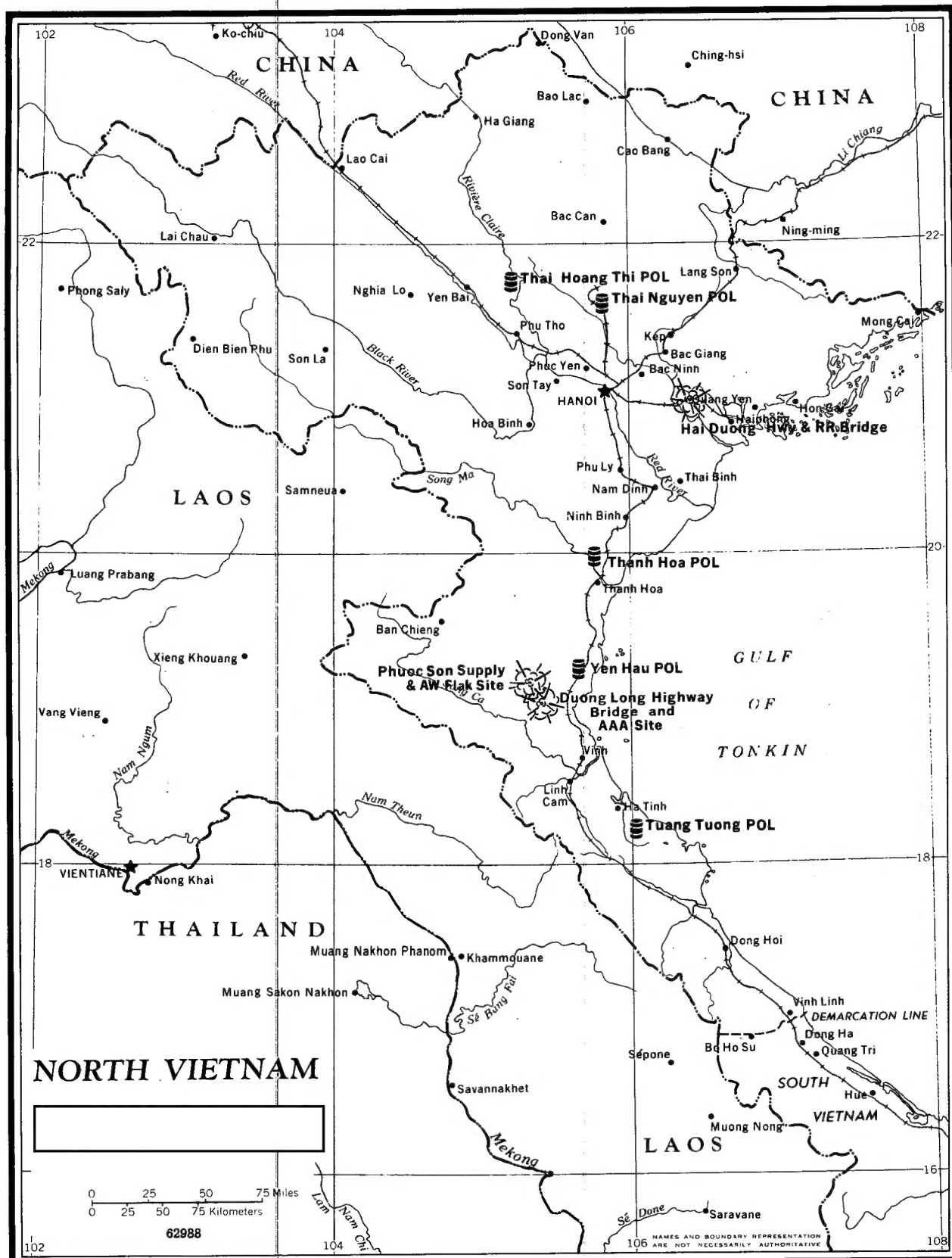
1. The five generals, including General Nguyen Chanh Thi, who were recently involved with the "struggle" movement in I Corps area, were treated leniently by the specially convened disciplinary council composed of 20 generals, yesterday. All of the generals were sentenced to 60 days house arrest and either dismissed or retired from the army. Only one officer was demoted, General Nhuan, former commander of the 1st ARVN Division. He was reduced one grade to the rank of Colonel.

2. Recent conversations of embassy officials with Father Joseph Tran Du, secretary general of the moderate Catholic citizens bloc, an organization of Northern Catholics, has revealed some new insights into their view of the current political scene. The prevailing mood in the organization, and presumably amongst most Catholics, is that the September elections to choose a national constitutional assembly are important. They do not oppose the Ky government. Although complaining about certain aspects of the electoral procedure--proportional list voting and too short a time for the filing of candidates--Du was not extremely bitter. Du maintained that Catholics were hard put to find good candidates willing to run, but he also conceded that Catholics were probably better off than some groups when it came to putting up candidates. In spite of these so-called difficulties, Catholic groups were pushing ahead with preparations to take part in the elections.

3. Du was also concerned about the possibility that the government was moving or intending to move against Catholic military officers, either because they were Catholics or because the government was fearful of a coup attempt from this group. When pressed, however, Du admitted that he had seen no real evidence of such a purge, but had only heard "reports."

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III. MILITARY DEVELOPMENTS IN NORTH VIETNAM

1. Five hundred and eighty three armed reconnaissance sorties were flown against various military targets in North Vietnam during 8-9 July.

2. On 8 July two US Navy aircraft restructed the Thanh Hoa POL storage facility 75 nautical miles south of Hanoi with 500- and 1,000-lb bombs as well as with rockets. Pilots reported all ordnance landed on target, producing numerous oil fires and large secondary explosions. The Thai Hoang Thi and Thai Nguyen POL storage areas, 75 miles northwest and 45 miles north of Hanoi respectively, and the Tuang Tuong oil depot 200 miles southeast of Hanoi were also attacked by US aircraft. The pilots reported good results.

3. Among the most significant targets attacked on 9 July were the Phuoc Son supply and automatic weapons (AW) flak site, 43 miles northwest of Vinh and the Duong Long highway bridge and antiaircraft site, 35 miles northwest of Vinh. Pilots reported all ordnance hit the Phuoc Son target area with one AW site destroyed. Preliminary damage assessment of the Duong Long strike indicated all ordnance on target with one gun battery destroyed and one damaged.

4. Preliminary reports indicate that 148 armed reconnaissance missions were flown against North Vietnam on 10 July. Notable were restrikes on the Hai Duong rail and highway bridge between Hanoi and Haiphong and the Yen Hau POL storage facility, 35 miles north of Vinh.

Missile Sightings on 8 July

5. Two flights of four USAF F-105s encountered 11 SA-2 missiles northwest of Hanoi on 8 July, according to preliminary pilot reports.

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The first flight observed three missiles in flight approximately 55 nautical miles northwest of Hanoi while the second flight encountered eight missiles and observed three probable SA-2 sites 15 nautical miles northwest of Hanoi. All aircraft took evasive action and were recovered safely with no damage reported. During the air action US pilots retaliated against the probable missile launching sites with SHRIKE--radar homing missile--rocket, and strafing attacks. Radar emissions ceased at the sites and three large orange fireballs were observed in the vicinity of the site nearest Hanoi. Since 24 April more than 120 SA-2s have been fired at US aircraft and missed.

US Aircraft Losses during 8-9 July

6. Two US strike aircraft were lost to enemy ground fire during 8-9 July. On 8 July a USAF F-105 was downed by ground fire 34 miles north of Hanoi. The aircraft burst into flames immediately after being hit and descended in an uncontrolled roll. Search and rescue (SAR) was not conducted due to location and inability to establish contact with the downed pilot. On 9 July, a USAF F4C was downed by hostile ground fire while on an armed reconnaissance mission 54 miles northwest of Hue. The two-man crew ejected and was picked up safely from dinghies by a SAR seaplane.

IV. OTHER COMMUNIST MILITARY DEVELOPMENTS

1. There is ~~is~~ nothing of significance to report.

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V. COMMUNIST POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS

1. Peking has sharply rejected the Indian proposal for reconvening the Geneva conference. Chou En-lai, in a speech to the Afro-Asian Writers meeting on 9 July, called the Indian move an attempt to aid the US at a "crucial moment" by trying to sap the fighting spirit of the Vietnamese people. He again demanded an immediate withdrawal of all US troops from Vietnam and declared that unless this took place, reconvening the Geneva conference is "entirely out of the question."

2. The Chinese Premier linked Moscow with New Delhi in his attack, asserting that everyone could see the "ignominious role" played by the Indians and the Soviets in the expansion of the "US war of aggression." Chou declared that neither could be included in the revolutionary united front against the US, and in fact should be targets for "struggle" by genuine revolutionary forces.

3. Chou declared that in response to increase US military pressure on Vietnam all those who are helping Hanoi should provide "unreserved" political, military, economic, and moral support. His statement that China had been doing this "from the very first day," however, indicates that despite the threatening tone of current Chinese propaganda, Peking is continuing to avoid any enlargement of its public commitment to assist the Vietnamese Communists.

4. The same implication is carried by remarks made by the Deputy Director of the PLA General Political Department at the celebration of Albanian Army day on 9 July. He declared that Chinese support of the Vietnamese Communists "has no limits" and repeated earlier assertions that the Peoples Liberation Army has "completed preparations" but made no reference to possible Chinese intervention, asserting only that should US forces dare to "spread the flames of war to China" they would be annihilated.

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5. Hanoi is publicizing steps to prepare a legal foundation for trying captured US pilots as "war criminals" should the North Vietnamese later decide to do so. A 10 July article in Nhan Dan by a North Vietnamese lawyer adduced the charter and conclusions of the post WWII Nurenberg trials to document the "war criminal" status of the pilots. US escalation of the war is defined by the Vietnamese as a "crime against peace" under article six of the Nurenberg charter. Article eight of the chapter, that acting on strict orders of a superior does not waive the responsibility of a subordinate, was put forward to support assertions of the alleged "criminal" status of the pilots. In addition, Hanoi radio on 9 and 10 July broadcast "depositions" taken from captured pilots in which the prisoners acknowledged they are "criminals of war."

6. On 9 July the Soviet Ministry of Foreign Affairs protested to the US Embassy the "direct threat" to Soviet merchant ships and seamen represented by the latest air strike on Haiphong petroleum facilities on 7 July. Moscow claimed that rocket shrapnel, machine gun bursts, and large "metallic objects" had landed in "close proximity" to four Soviet ships near the Haiphong docks.

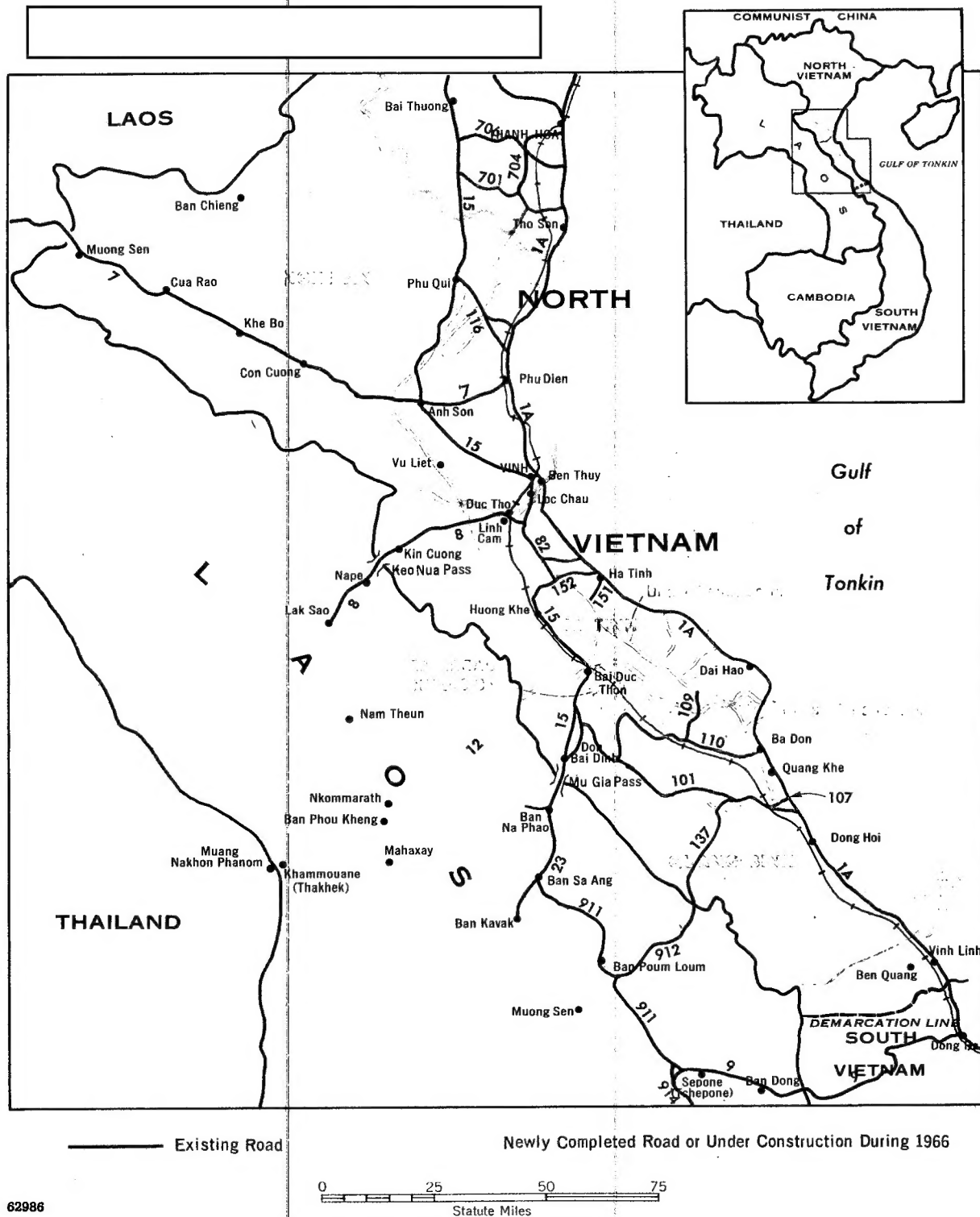
7. The pro forma protest demanded an immediate end to such violations of "elementary principles of freedom of merchant shipping." It concluded with a rather vague and weak reference to the US "responsibility" for the "possible consequences" of such actions. However on several occasions in the past Moscow has similarly revealed a sensitivity to American overflights and "harassment" of Soviet shipping in the South China Sea. The Soviets may hope such protests will help to deter rumored American plans to mine Haiphong or otherwise step-up its offensive against the DRV.

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VI. OTHER MAJOR ASPECTS

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2. An inland road system, supplementing existing major routes, is nearing completion in North Vietnam's three southern provinces--Military Region IV. The new roads will provide a more flexible system for movement of supplies into southern North Vietnam and Laos and reduce the vulnerability of the transport system to air strikes by providing alternate routes.

3. Construction of the new route was started in March 1966 and has entailed new road building as well as the improvement of existing rural routes. Work has continued in spite of air strikes and reported shortages of both equipment and labor. Completion of the route apparently has a high priority and it is expected that the target date of August will be met.

4. In the northern part of the system, a 140-mile road serving as an alternate to Routes 1A and 15, has been completed from Thanh Hao south to the old railroad southwest of Vinh. Supplies moving by this route can avoid the potential bottleneck at Vinh and be transported on the tramway either down to Route 15 leading to Mu Gia Pass or farther south to access roads to Route 137--the recently completed entry road into the Laotian infiltration corridor.

5. South of Vinh an additional 125 miles of road nearing completion will provide a maze of

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alternate routes with numerous east-west connections between coastal Route 1A and interior roads and on a north-south alternate to 1A from West of Ha Tinh to the Ron Ferry. In addition, the old railroad or "tramway" has been extended southward for a short distance and is being connected by road to Route 110.

6. When construction now under way is completed an interconnected system of road, rail, coastal and inland water transport will provide North Vietnam with maximum flexibility in the movement of supplies into and through Military Region IV. Particularly in the area south of Vinh, goods arriving in the coastal area by sea or by road can be transshipped over numerous alternate routes to either of the two roads leading into the Laotian Panhandle.

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